

By His close friend and adviser
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THE remarkable American warning to Nasser that General Keightley had been chosen to command an invasion of Egypt and was already training his men was one of a number he received about Britain's and France's determination on military intervention.

Egypt's friends inside the Baghdad Pact reported that Nuri Said was convinced there was going to be an invasion.

The Eoka movement both sent news of large troop, air and shipping movements based on the two islands. Eoka sent photographs of the French Nord Atlas transports arriving at R.A.F. bases on Cyprus. Merchant ship captains passing through the Suez Canal also told of large concentrations of warships and landing craft.

In order to meet these threats and because he still thought Anglo-French collusion with the Israelis was the taboo game, President Nasser had withdrawn most of the Army from the Sinai leaving only two battalions at El Arish, two at Rafah and two at Abu Arheila.

When the Six Principles were accepted at the United Nations on October 13, 1956, President Nasser estimated that the danger of invasion had dropped to 10 per cent. In fact, practically ruled it out. The proposed meeting between

Britain, France and Egypt at Geneva on October 29 had been put off, but this postponement was regarded as part of the diplomatic game. On that day, President Nasser went to a birthday party for one of his sons. There were children and cakes, games and movies. The President was enjoying himself when a messenger arrived with a slip of paper.

It carried the news of the Israeli announcement that they had sent an armoured column into the Sinai. So far there had been no reports from the Egyptian Army because the bulk of that Army had been withdrawn to protect the

to watch the empty spaces of the desert and so the first news the President had came from the monitoring service which listened-in to Israeli radio traffic.

The President left the birthday party, called his colleagues to a meeting, and asked for an assessment of the situation. The first conclusion, given to the President at seven o'clock that evening, was that it was a limited operation.

But, at 10 o'clock, the Israelis announced that their forces were already close to the Suez Canal. They were referring to the battalion of paratroops they had dropped just short of the Mitla Pass. And that gave the whole operation a new dimension.

When the news was passed to the special assessment committee it revised its thinking and decided that the Israelis had mounted a big operation because Egypt had been successful with the nationalisation of Suez. This was their revenge for the United Nations' vote on the Six Principles.